

Moving beyond the talk: Universities must become anti-racist

In 2016, **Dr Akile Ahmet** wrote a piece for the LSE Impact Blog entitled '[We need to speak about race': Examining the barriers to full and equal participation in university life](#)'. Nearly five years on, she reflects on the state of Black and minority ethnic representation and inclusion in Higher Education. She finds that whilst her early call – to put race on the agenda- has been accommodated in the form of Equality and Diversity initiatives, this has not translated into change. She discusses her work on inclusive education and offers a call to action to transform anti-racism from a policy to a practice.

In April 2016 I wrote a piece for the LSE Impact Blog entitled '[We need to speak about race': Examining the barriers to full and equal participation in university life](#)'. Now, in October 2020, we are in a very different world. We need to move beyond talking and have a call to action as a collective.

It was in [April 2015 that the Rhodes Must Fall](#) protest began at the University of Cape Town and there was a call to decolonise education in South Africa. Both the protest and the movement had a global impact and students and staff in [UK universities were calling to decolonise their universities](#). Since then, UK higher education has witnessed an overwhelming growth in the number of 'initiatives' that attempt to integrate racial justice and inclusion in the curriculum and beyond. However, while attempts to embed such movements into UK higher education are welcomed, academia remains institutionally and ideologically [overwhelmingly white](#).



Much of the focus of Equality and Diversity within higher education has been on increasing representation. When I wrote the blog in 2016, there was 1 Black full professor at LSE, for the period 2018-2019 according to [LSE EDI data](#) there was still only 1 Black full professor. A brief snapshot of the data in the higher education sector also shows us that the picture remains very much the same across the sector.

Race in the Academy- the numbers

- [Advance HE](#) has found that more than 14,000 White men were recorded as professors, while just 90 Black men held positions of the same status.
- Black and minority ethnic academics [are less likely](#) to be in senior decision-making roles. [Recent data](#) has identified that in 2018, 94.5% of academic managers, directors and senior officials were white and 5.5% Black and minority ethnic. Similarly, 94.1% of professional services staff who are managers, directors and senior officials were white compared with 5.9% who identified as Black and minority ethnic.
- Black and minority ethnic academics are more likely to be on fixed term contracts compared to their white colleagues. According to the [Universities and Colleges Union's](#) UK data for the period 2017/2018, 42% of Black and minority ethnic academics were on fixed term contracts, 6% of Black academics were on zero-hour contracts and 18% were hourly paid lecturers.
- Black and minority ethnic students are still [underrepresented](#) in elite, research intensive universities at less than 4% compared with the UK average of 8%.

Likewise, statistics demonstrate similar disparities with students.

Re-valuing race

The numbers demonstrate that whilst equality and diversity has been on the agenda, there has been very little in terms of substantive change in the culture of institutions. Racism is about value and when you have institutions who don't always value all people, even when Black and minority ethnic students do get their foot in the door to university, they face lower degree outcomes, racism, feelings of isolation and barriers to their career progressions. In [my own recent research](#), I draw attention to the experiences of Black and ethnic minority postgraduate students and the totalising nature of whiteness on the university campus. I show that universities are not providing institutional arrangements that Black and minority ethnic postgraduate students can belong to and in. [The same is true for Black and minority ethnic staff](#).

[Addressing racial barriers in HE means we must recognise each other's humanity](#) and dismantle forms of dehumanisation as they relate to, for example, class, (dis)ability, land dispossession, patriarchy, religion, and sexuality. The [LSE Inclusive Education Action Plan \(IEAP\)](#) seeks to do this. It is one strand of work that LSE has committed to, to embed change in the institutional environment. By transforming our learning and working environment, this will, in time I hope, lead to the university becoming institutionally and habitually anti-racist and inclusive for all staff and students. The IEAP is a collective call to action, an educational ecosystem. The plan has 5 main strands of work:

1. **Academic Mentoring:** The academic mentoring relationship is one of development academically and personally. It is essential that students have the best possible experience of academic mentoring to enable growth and development.
2. **Developing Higher Education Identities:** A focussed recognition on students' identities as they progress through their 'student journey' to becoming future scholars.
3. **Inclusive Pedagogy:** Black and minority ethnic students are often struggling against a system which seeks to exclude them from the outset. Inclusion and inclusive teaching should not be tacked onto equality and diversity policy as [I have argued](#) recently, but should mark the beginning of dismantling dominant structures within higher education.
4. **Curriculum Enhancement:** Having a curriculum which is both inclusive and accessible to all students enables a greater sense of belonging. Curriculum enhancement focuses on both diversifying and decolonising. It does not conflate the two.
5. **Anti-Racism:** The IEAP aims through workshops and a community of practice to create a space of anti-racist education and belonging for both staff and students.



Inclusive Education Action Plan

These 5 strands of work aim to bring together all of the LSE community and ensure that anti-racism is more than just a statement or a policy. LSE prides itself on being academically rigorous; it needs to extend that principle to its social and cultural spheres as well.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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